The Angler, the Big Tarpon and the Monstrous Shark

Strange Adventures of the Men Who Associate With the Fish of the East Coast of Florida---Difficulties and Thrills of the Sport of Angling for Tarpon.

"Dah dey roll!"

This is the cry of the colored watcher on key or houseboat, on guard while the sportsmen are killing time over minor game—barracouta, crevillee, kingfish, jack, or what not—when the tarpon breaks water in the pass. It is a call to action, like the old time "There she blows!" of the Nantucket whalers. It summons the anglers to make ready for the silver king, and to test their skill and mettle as rodsmen.

Anglers from every part of the United States are now southward bound for the tarpon fishing, which begins this month and continues through April and May. The big fish abound in every estuary, lagoon and creek, but here they may only be caught by bottom fishing.

Rod in hand, as the angler awaits in his rowboat the coming of the tarpon, he has to display both activity and patience—the first to save the bit of mullet from the thousands of catfish and crabs that are a constant pest to him, the second to be ready, despite all discomforts, when the mighty denizen of the waters is in the humor to take the bait.

Huge as it is, the tarpon mouths the end of mullet as gently as a lamb nibbling its first grass, or as smoothly as an eel sucking in a bob of worms. At the faint twitch that tells that the big fish is mouthing the bait the angler pays out the coiled up slack of the line and holds his breath in excitement.

A quick strike will be sure to lose the fish. As with the pilgrim from the Blarney stone, the motto at this juncture must be, "Don't hope to hinder him, or to bewilder him!" Only when the bait has been gorged may the rod be lifted and the fight started.

The tarpon hooked in the throat at still fishing in this way are the ones that jump and plunge the most to break free, and while the struggle rages the playing of the big fish is an excitement that atones for all the hours of waiting and battling with the bait stealing pests of fins and claws.

More than once a shark has nipped off part of a tarpon, as the fish has been hoisted on the tackle to the waiting sloop after being killed, and sharks are always a nuisance to the anglers as bait stealers. On this account the tarpon hooks sold in town are rigged on so that a shark may bite off the bait and chase away, with a "good riddance" from the fisherman to speed the robber.

The hook for bottom fishing is tied to a stout line of cotton bound with copper wire, but some six or eight inches nearest to the hook is unprotected, to accommodate Mr. Shark, or else the hook is fastened to a rawhide thong. Once the bait is swallowed, neither the smell of wirebound line nor the rawhide will be cut by the rough cartilage of the tarpon's jaws. A cod hook with outward point that will readily imbed itself in the tarpon's throat, or one of the O'Shaughnessy pattern, is ordinarily used in bottom fishing, with a 6 foot 6 inch rod, preferably of split bamboo, and 200 yards of line should be on the multiplying reel.

As fly casting is superior to bait fishing for trout, the best sport with the tarpon lies not in bottom, but in surface fishing. The inlets between the mangrove and scrub clad keys that form the chain of breakwaters between the Florida lagoons and the Atlantic, termed the passes, are the haunts of the true tarpon sportsman.

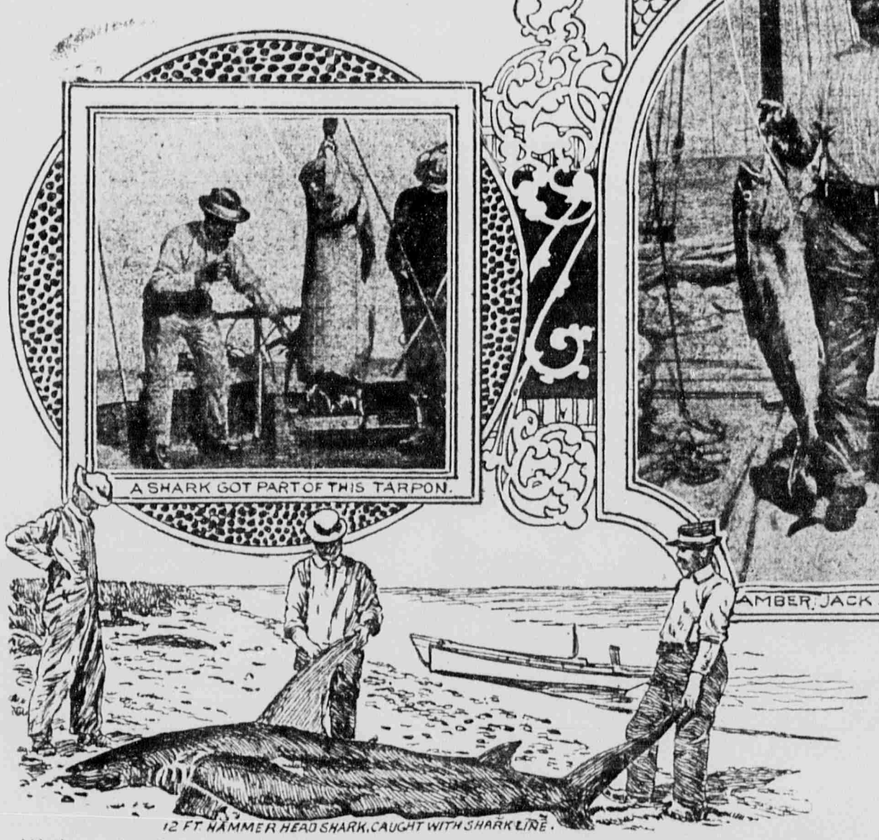
The tarpon are caught on the changing tides, with live fish, or its imitation, as bait, which is floated on the current from an anchored rowboat, and by trolling when the tide does not serve. Anchors are slipped when a fish is hooked and the kill is usually made by landing the fish on the beach.

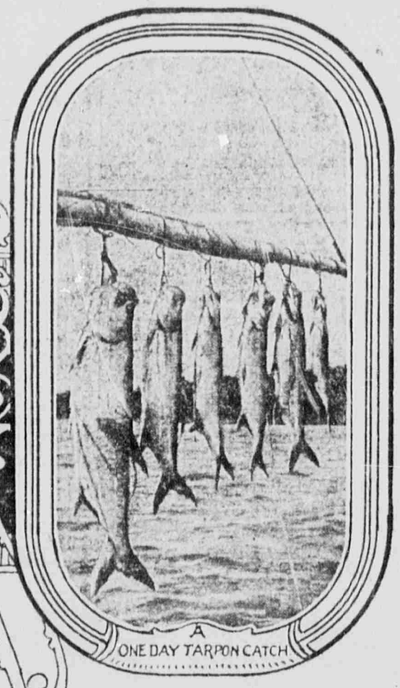
Trolling for tarpon is a comparatively new variation of the sport, for only by accident was it discovered that the fish so often seen leaping in the passes by the men at bottom fishing could be caught in this way. The sport dates back only to 1895, and among the first amateurs to engage in the pastime with the proper equipment were the late Pierre Lorillard and the still eager angler John G. Heckscher.

The rapid water and the force with which the strike must be made necessitate a somewhat stiffer rod and a tougher line than are used in bottom fishing. Split bamboo, the rod that has been brought to greatest perfection in this country and has supplanted the old time wood rods even in English trout streams and Scotch salmon rivers, is the chosen material for the pass outfit. The length will be some seven feet, the weight from twenty-four to twenty-six ounces, with independent butts, and the tips weighing fourteen ounces.

The line is of from twenty-one to thirty thread hand twisted linen, of which the large multiplying reel will hold some 600 feet. The hook is fastened by a length of German silver chain, which breaks the rigidity, to a snell of piano wire, about five feet in length, attached by a swivel to the line. The rougher snell used in bottom fishing would frighten off the tarpon in the clear water of the passes.

There will be a drag, to serve as a brake, on the reel usually, while the hook is of a special device. The tarpon, which thrives on hard shell crabs and similar tropical sea food of tough epidermis, rejoices in a mouth impervious to a hook, as glass will turn all materials less sharp than a diamond.




A ONE DAY TARPON CATCH

The one vulnerable place, its heel of Achilles, is the corner of the jaw. A well rounded hook with a peculiar inturned point is deemed the best pattern.

Statistics have it that only one fish in four struck is hooked, and of those hooked only one in four is landed. The tarpon, thanks to the difficulty of imbedding the barb of the hook, is a fighter that may at any time win out from the angler, and, as the bait is cast out, make off with a contemptuous flap of his tail. As a matter of fact, the hook often drops from the mouth of the fish on the beach, revealing how lightly it has been imbedded and how much the skill of the angler has aided in bringing the tarpon to book.

The fishermen who own their own yachts or houseboats and are free to seek out a lonely pass obtain usually the cream of the sport. But the tarpon is no tuft-hunter and bites as readily for the barelegged native as the duck-clad millionaire. In fact, many of the biggest fish have been caught by anglers out for a trip on a hired sloop.

The size and gameness of the fish often compel a long struggle, sometimes of hours, and in the long run the exhaustion of the angler accounts for the loss of many a tarpon.

Recently at the New York Athletic Club, a noted amateur tarpon fisherman, Charles F. Naething, engaged in a man-fishing contest to give the members a taste of the real thing. He used a split bamboo rod with belt and socket, and a twenty-one strand line. This was attached to an iron ring in the canvas helmet of one of the bath attendants, who, when time was called, made a dive off and swam to the far end of the tank. The time limit was set at twenty minutes, but the angler reeled in the spluttering and struggling man fish in 4 minutes and 19 seconds.

"No one will sit and wait for a bite at bottom fishing who has ever tried the delights of trolling for tarpon," said Mr. Naething, when started off on his piscatorial hobby. "My fishing is from a houseboat in a canvas canoe, with a seat for the oarsman and a chair on a swivel for myself, which permits a cast in any direction. A light boat, to my mind, is as important as the proper tackle and a great improvement over the ordinary wooden boats, although it has to be handled tenderly in a sea.

"My largest tarpon was caught in Shark River Pass and weighed 198½ pounds, but I hooked what I believed to have been the record tarpon last winter at Knight's Pass and had it stolen by a shark. The shark, from what I saw of it, must have been twenty feet long, and as he gulped down the tarpon, which I am sure weighed 250 pounds, in three bites, you may imagine its girth and spread of teeth. The shark did not turn over and make fresh darts each time, but just gulped down that tarpon like a greedy boy biting a banana.

"Now, it's a funny thing that while a shark and a tarpon will swim along together side by side, in seeming friendship and make war together on the mullets, as soon as a tarpon is hooked the fish of prey at once turns on it. By an uncanny instinct, the shark seems to know that the tarpon is powerless to escape it, and under these circumstances the smallest of sharks will rush for a bite at the largest tarpon.

"The sharks levy an incessant toll on the anglers in the passes, and their share is fully every second fish. After playing a fish until it is half spent and one is pretty sure of it, a convulsive renewal of vigor and strategy by the tarpon tells that a shark has appeared.

"The one thing to do is to give the tarpon line to run and to follow it, in the hope that the shark will be lost. This is what occurred with my big tarpon.

"After an hour of fighting, half the time in the air, I was sure I had the tarpon under control. The desperate renewal of the struggle and plunge to the bottom told me a shark was about, and, after easing off and a row of two miles, I thought we had lost the thief. I began reeling in, but with the approach of the tarpon to the surface the shark dashed along and secured his dinner."

There is also sport in the passes catching kingfish, jack and barracouta, running in weight from ten to thirty pounds, with sea trout, or weakfish, sheepshead and channel bass galore in the bays. On light tackle, the bone fish is like zigzag lightning in play, and many anglers deem this sport alone good payment for the Florida journey.

The fish range from two to ten pounds in weight and are caught in water from one to three feet deep, a favorite fishing ground being a few miles below Miami. The reefs where they are caught are dry at low tide, and the fish come in with the flood, ravenously hungry and in search of tid bits in the hollows of the rocks.

The equipment must be strong, or the bone fish will rend the lines and smash the rods to flinders. Bass tackle will do nicely, with a fine nine strand line.

Discovery of the Flamingo City

Exploit of Ornithologist Chapman in a Remote Bahama Islet.

Few who pause before the new flamingo group at the American Museum of Natural History have any idea that it represents a noteworthy achievement of ornithology.

Since the study of ornithology arose, the flamingo metropolis was one of the chief undiscovered cities of Birdland. Other great capitals of the bird world were explored and photographed—the distant Farallones in the Pacific, where millions of gulls, puffins and cormorants congregate; Shoal Lake, the northwestern capital of the marsh birds; Pyramid Lake and Pelican Island, both capitals of the pelican folk; Cobb's Island, the Virginia metropolis of the seabirds; Gardiner's Island, a populous fishhawk city, and many other bird cities scattered over the face of the earth. But the metropolis of the flamingo folk remained the Lhasa of Birdland, the North Pole of the ornithologist. Shyest of birds, building its nest on remote tropical islets, no white man had ever seen the flamingo's breeding place.

The picture of this possible city, as suggested by sentinel rows of the brilliant birds outlined against the blue of tropical seas and skies, has haunted the naturalists of the world. What a bird city would that be, with thousands of these flaming forms collected within its boundaries!

For years this vision tormented Frank Chapman, bird man at the American Museum, until in 1902 he made his first trip to the Bahamas in search of the reality. He found a city, and counted 2,000 dwellings. But all were empty. No one in the world knew when the wise bird nested. Moving day had come, and parents and children were all dispersed.

"When I counted those 2,000 nests in a space of 30 by 100 yards," said Mr. Chapman, "I knew that I should never rest again until I had seen the most striking sight in the bird world."

For two years this sight tormented his dreams. He worried over it in his sleep.

He established relations with one of the twelve white inhabitants of the island of the flamingoes. What island this is Mr. Chapman does not tell. He is keeping the secret of the flamingo folk.

Negro scouts were sent out to locate the flamingo city. All returned unsuccessful but one, faithful Peter. When Peter reported the discovery of the city, the word fled over the wires to Mr. Chapman, then in Florida.

He started immediately for the island in a schooner, there being no steamer service. For nine horrible days they beat against calms, squalls and head winds, to land finally in a rainstorm which precipitated six inches of moisture in two hours. Then three days more they spent in rowboats, threading tortuous channels and tiny creeks, among endless unmapped sand banks and wastes of marl and mango swamp. Twelve days; and who knew but the little flamingoes would be hatched and gone?

They searched the point where Peter had located the flamingo city. It was just behind a low screen of woods, he said.

The ornithologist crept through those low woods in a state of excitement which amounted to physical pain. Was it possible that the expectation of years was about to be realized?

No, a ruined city lay on the other side of the woods. Nests washed away, hundreds of broken eggs, showed how disastrous the storm which had visited the bird city. The disappointment was acute.

As a last hope Peter was sent away to the old city of 1902. Upon his return joy reigned in the rowboats. The second city, on higher ground than the first, had escaped the flood, and the flamingoes were there.

The party landed on the only point of solid sand large enough to hold their tent, although they could reach a hand into the water on either side. Not a bird was near, but Peter pointed over the waste of mud to a low lying pink cloud a mile away—just a flush of pink on the ground.

The ornithologist plunged through the mud, wading, sloshing, struggling. In ten minutes he had reached a point where the glass resolved the pink cloud into pink birds. An indescribable feeling of exultation possessed him.

Suddenly a deep honk sounded the alarm through Flamingo City. The cloud moved upward.

"The earth seemed to discharge birds," says Mr. Chapman.

In a flaming stream they poured to a lagoon not far away. Twice they swept toward the intruders in a compact, almost terrifying mass, but wheeled and returned without attacking.

The next morning Mr. and Mrs. Chapman returned, and the birds fled as before. Mr. Chapman hastily raised his blind. It was a large umbrella with a drapery or valance sewed around the bottom, so that when opened and the handle stuck in the ground, it made a little round tent, colored a greenish gray.

Mrs. Chapman started back to the boat, Mr. Chapman crept inside the umbrella, a prey to intolerable anxiety. Would the birds return?

Twice they swept toward Mrs. Chapman and back to their lagoon. Then it was proved that the flamingo cannot count two. Their reconnoissance showed a moving figure rapidly growing smaller in the distance. Their education had been neglected. They could not tell that two had come and only one had gone.

They returned to their home, and to the ornithologist's intense astonishment they returned on foot, a stately army of rosy forms, marching steadily across the mud flats. The flamingo does everything with dignity except his eating, when he stands on his head.

A forest of slim necks waved in the air as each bird touched her own nest lightly with her bill. Then they burst into conversation, each bird telling all she knew about it at the top of her voice.

Every bird hopped onto her own nest, stood perfectly upright for a moment and then peacefully resumed the process of incubating. Meanwhile there was an ornithologist inside an umbrella almost crazy with excitement, taking photographs like mad.

The second morning he moved his blind into the very heart of the city, within arm's reach of the nests. Every time he looked out of a crack in the umbrella he seemed he looking squarely into a bird's eye, and he could hardly believe the bird gazer did not recognize what she was looking into.

He stayed all day and day after day. He saw the birds mend their nests, ravaged by the storm, reaching their bills down from the top of the structure for a bill full of mud, then plastering it neatly on with bills and feet. He measured the nests, eight inches high, with a depression of one inch at the top, in which lay a single egg.

He disproved many hoary fallacies. Since Sir Henry Blake made some incomplete investigations in 1887 it had been believed that the father flamingo stood beside his spouse while she was sitting upon the egg. Mr. Chapman proved him to be an even more gentlemanly and domestic consort. He takes his turn with the mother in incubating the eggs.

The birds work in two shifts, changing at morning and evening, when long rose colored lines come flying in from every point of the compass, and others, made up of the birds relieved, fly away in their turn to the feeding grounds. As Peter said: "I do t'ink, sah, when lady fillymingo leave nes', gen'leman fillymingo take huh place, sah."

All day an astonishing uproar fills Flamingo City. An elevated train could pass in close proximity without being heard.

But at noon silence reigns. The hour for siesta has come. Each bird disposes her long neck in a graceful coil, tucks her head under the feathers on her back, and sleeps. But at a single honk of alarm up rise thousands of snaky rosy necks, like a mass of glowing, writhing serpents.

In order that they should never know that any one was in the blind, Mrs. Chapman came to the city at a certain hour every afternoon, and during the absence of the birds Mr. Chapman retired, while the flamingo never seemed to know that two went walking away where one had come. During their absence he would walk through the city counting the little birds.

These, when only a day old, would hop out of the nest and scuttle off, showing the inordinate shyness of the bird; for ordinary woodland birds do not know the sensation of fear till some time after their birth. Upon the return of the parents each little bird would run home. Most of them recognized the sound of their parent's voice; but if now and then a little chap lost his way and tried to climb into the wrong nest, a sharp peck on the nape of his neck sent him on to his own door. How did each mother know how to pick out her own little white baby?

The little chicks look exactly like barnyard chicks, covered with yellowish down, excepting that they have abnormally long legs and bills. Half grown they are extraordinarily ugly, their bodies, covered with dull gray feathers, perched at the top, apparently, of a ridiculous pair of stilts.

All this time the explorers were sleeping on pneumatic mattresses, with the water gurgling at the bedside. They calculated that the mattress would float if the waters rose in the night; and they worried more over the fate of their photographic slides than of themselves. So Mr. Chapman sadly tore himself away before Flamingo City disbanded for the year.

Each pair of flamingoes rear a single chicken, so they probably hardly hold their own. And as fresh meat is rare in those parts and little flamingoes very sweet and tender, the negro natives love them very much. The flamingo race is doomed, despite its desperate hiding.

When it is gone this unique museum group, with its mounted birds on the sandy beach melting almost indistinguishably into the painted background, will remain to tell the tale. Many persons who pause before the group find that they never knew what color flamingoes were. They are a pure salmon pink, the exact color of the denizens of the Columbia River, but deepening in the soft rich plumage of the neck and breast into an exquisite velvety effect.

Was Wed on a Nickel.

From the Kansas City Journal.

A wedding was solemnized in Maysville a few nights ago. When the minister called for his fee the bridegroom informed him he had but five cents and thought he had better keep that to go to housekeeping on. The minister thought so, too.

BEQUESTS TO PET ANIMALS.

WILLS THAT CARE FOR DOGS, CATS, MONKEYS AND ALLIGATORS.

Lord Eldon's Attachment to His Dog, Pincher—Cat Home With a Thyatre and Rat Holes—A Rajah's Provision for Three Elephants and a Tiger.

Of the bequests made to dogs, probably one of the most famous is that of Lord Eldon who, in 1838, in bequeathing his faithful Pincher to Lady Frances Banks left the dog an annuity of £8 during the term of his natural life for his maintenance. Lord Campbell, in referring to this bequest, said Lord Eldon's attachment to this animal was very touching. He used to say while he caressed him: "Poor Pincher belonged to poor William Henry, and after I took the sacrament with him when he was dying, he called me back as I was leaving the room and said: 'Father, you will take care of poor Pincher.'" This dog was often painted by noted artists, and was introduced into several pictures of his master.

A wonderful bequest, says *Tit-Bits*, was made by a certain Dr. Christian, who was the dean of the Faculté de Droit at Vienna. He bequeathed a sum of no less than 6,600 florins for the comfortable subsistence of his three dogs.

Probably what was one of the most detailed and elaborate bequests to animals was made by a certain Jonathan Jackson of Columbus, Ohio, who died about forty years ago, leaving orders to his executor to erect a home for cats, the plans of which it was found he had drawn up himself with great care. The building was to contain dormitories, a dining room, an area for conversation, grounds for exercise, and there was a series of gently sloping roofs provided for climbing, rats' holes for the amusement and sport of the inmates of the home, and a theatre in which the cats were to be daily assembled to listen to an accordion, which was to be played for one hour by an attendant. There was also a hospital provided, to which were attached a surgeon and three or four professional nurses.

Of indirect bequests to animals, probably that made by a codicil to a will of a Thomas Edinett, who died some thirty-five years ago, is one of the most curious, for it provided as follows: "I bequeath to my faithful servant, Elizabeth Osborne, on condition that she take care of my favorite dog, an annuity of £50, to be paid to her quarterly."

It was claimed by the said Elizabeth Osborne that she was entitled to the annuity, discharged of the condition of looking after the dog, by reason of the fact that the dog in the possession of her master at the time he had made the codicil had died previously to his master's death, and although he had replaced Romp by another animal called Sambo, the bequest did not apply to the said second dog. The Vice-Chancellor held that she was entitled to the annuity for her life, and he expressed a hope, notwithstanding that in his opinion the annuity was not dependent upon her taking care of Sambo, that she would do so.

In 1873 there died in Paris an old lady named Mme. Perren, and she by will did for dogs very much what Jonathan Jackson had previously done for cats. She left a singular legacy to the city of Marseilles, amounting to 85,000 francs, for the express purpose of founding within its walls a hospital for dogs and horses.

In strange bequests to animals, birds have not been forgotten, and the large sum of £200 per annum, payable quarterly, was left by one Elizabeth H[illegible] to a Mrs. Mary Dyer of Park street, [illegible]minster, on condition that the said [illegible]ssary should look after and attend a favorite parrot, whose society the testatrix had for many years enjoyed. There was a proviso that, should the said Mrs. Dyer decease before the parrot, the annuity should continue to some "respectable female who should not be a servant." The lucky bird was to be housed in a cage to cost not less than £20, which should be roomy, large and high, and was not to be taken out of England.

Dogs, cats, horses and parrots are, however, not the only animals that have benefited by eccentric testators, for the Count of Mirandola, who died in the first quarter of the last century, left a handsome annuity to a carp which he had had as a pet in an aquarium for upward of twenty years, with directions for the special treatment of the fishy pet.

A Castilian left a sum of money, amounting to about £150, the interest of which was to be expended in the care and feeding of a lizard which the Spaniard for some years previous to his death had been in the habit of treating as a pet and a companion.

Quite a large sum was left by an Rajput Prince some thirty years ago "for the maintenance in comfort" of his three favorite elephants and a pet tiger. A curious provision was that special trappings and cloths were to be provided for the elephants, while the tiger was to be regaled with a specially mentioned diet and was to be provided with a solid gold collar, studded with a large number of precious stones.

A Mr. Garland, who died in the early part of last century, left a will containing the following clause: "I bequeath to my monkey, my dear and amusing Jacko, the sum of £10 per annum, to be employed for his sole and exclusive use and benefit. To my favorite dog, Shock, and my well beloved cat, Jib, a pension of £5, and I desire, in case of the death of either of the three, the lapsed pension shall pass to the other two, between whom it is equally to be divided. On the death of all three the sum appropriated to this purpose shall become the property of my daughter, Gertrude, to whom I give this preference among my children because of the large family she has and the difficulty she finds in bringing them up."

Quite recently in the South of France an old lady left a sum of more than 1,400 francs to provide an annuity for the monkey of an organ grinder which had been in the habit of amusing her almost daily during a long period of illness. There was a provision that on the death of the monkey the interest upon this sum of 1,400 francs, which was to be invested in one of the accredited French loans, was to pass to a hospital run by a certain veterinary surgeon for the benefit of animals who might be brought to him for treatment.

Some twenty years ago a rich South American died who left a considerable sum of money in trust for a pet alligator, which for some years had lived in a small artificial lake which had been made in his owner's grounds for the purpose, the special provision being that his scales were to be cleaned at least twice per annum, and he was to be well fed, and when ill to have the attention of a veterinary surgeon.

THE ATHLETIC CONDUCTOR.

He Gets a Good Chance on the Night Cars to Keep in Trim, and Takes It.

Some of the surface car conductors belong to athletic organizations, and do their training when they can while working on the cars. Some of them have little exercising devices of their own.

Those that have night runs have the best opportunity for athletic stunts. It is no rare sight to see a conductor on an early morning run, when traffic is light, running along side the car within speaking distance of the motorman. The Eighth avenue line offers the best opportunity for sprinting, as the conductor has all the advantages of a track running alongside the Central Park wall. Conductors fond of athletics make an effort to get this run.

Of course, the conductor only leaves his car when there are but two or three passengers on it. It usually amuses the passengers to see the conductor running and the motorman making pace by turning on the power for him.

A run of a mile or so is usually all that the conductor wants at a stretch. Then he gets on the car again. The other morning about 3 o'clock a conductor on a northbound Eighth avenue car took a run, beginning at Fifty-ninth street and stopping at Ninety-ninth street, a good two mile bit. He ran the distance in 12 minutes and 15 seconds, good time, in view of the fact that he wore his ordinary clothes and heavy shoes. Incidentally, he won 75 cents from the three passengers in the car, who bet him a quarter each that he could not cover the distance in 13 minutes.

GOOD YEAR FOR FUR HUNTERS

AND PRICES MAY DROP A LITTLE NEXT SEASON.

Russia May Be Too Poor to Buy So Many Skins, and There Are More and Better Ones in the Market Than Usual—First Reports In From the Hudson Bay.

LACHINE, Canada, March 11.—The trappers of the north, the fur collecting depots and the ordinary country storekeepers are accustomed at this season to send out their bales of skins to the wholesale dealers in the great centres. A little later the breaking up of the snow roads will hinder travel, and the increasing heat will injure and throw such pelts as have not been properly dried upon the hands of the men who are least able to stand the loss.

A great deal of the fur is shipped, as it has been ever since the time of Charles II., directly by water from Hudson Bay. Until the annual sales have been held, which is after the arrival of the steamer from Great Britain, the prices of furs for the coming season are never established.

That is the great rounding up time, when the extent of the winter's harvest of fur the world over is exactly calculated. A fair estimate of it may be made, however, from the size of the bales and the quality of their contents as they arrive just at this season.

Trappers who work south of the height of land which divides old Canada from the Hudson Bay territory are generally heard from early this month for the first time since they went for their lines in the autumn. The reports so far received are decidedly encouraging.

There has been a great deal of snow, but also a good many fine bright days and clear nights. In cloudy times most wild creatures stay under cover as much as possible, and the hunters' baits are likely to be snowed under. It is in clear weather that animals get out to forage for food and to play about in the snow.

Then, the cold has been steady since it set in early in November, with no prolonged thaw to loosen the hair. The snow has been kept in good order, the moisture being frozen out of it, which keeps the fur from fading.

Many of these conditions were so unpropitious last winter that the supply of furs taken from the woods was smaller than usual. That meant so many more animals left to mature, or to breed for this season. Rabbits, or rather bush hares, have seldom been so plentiful as they have this year and these inoffensive creatures are the common food of all who live in the woods, from man to the tiny weasel or ermine.

But most important of all is the fact that this is a fisher year. Why, no one knows, but so it is that for a year or two these valuable black animals are to be found in greater or smaller number. Then for perhaps six or eight years there will be nothing seen of them at all. Old hunters make many guesses as to what becomes of them and why or where they hide, but no one has ever been able to furnish a really satisfactory reason for their temporary disappearance.

Suddenly some winter the trappers' hearts are gladdened by the sight of their peculiar trail or they get them in fox traps. Fishers have been plentiful this winter, though they were scarce as hens' teeth last year.

It is always sure to be a good trapping year when fishers are about. In fact, they seem to be a kind of gauge whereby the fur season may be tested. If it is good enough for fishers, then every other fur bearing animal may be expected to do well.

So it has been this last winter. Fur has been plentiful. Trappers have been unusually successful in their captures. The quality is better than it was last year.

Unfortunately there is always such a wide difference between the price paid to the trappers and the actual value of fur that it is impossible to forecast the price of fashionable furs for next season. But foresighted men foretell a drop in prices of the costliest varieties because of the troubles in Russia, which is the heaviest buyer of the most valuable furs.

THE LOON'S TOUGH HIDE.

Sometimes Saves Its Life—How Mother Bird Cares for Young.

The loon differs from other birds in a number of ways. I have reason to think that many people are unaware of some, at least, of these peculiarities.

The loon has a hide as tough as that of an ox, and its feathers cannot be plucked without first scalding the bird as you would a hog. This incident will give some idea of the toughness of the hide: About thirty-five years ago, writes W. A. Linkletter in *Forest and Stream*, when I was living in Michigan, a loon was shot at with a shotgun industriously all summer, without apparently doing him any harm.

In the fall I killed him with a rifle, just to convince the people that a loon could be shot and killed. He had many times been shot at with a rifle by the same people who had used the shotgun, and they had become convinced that he dove so quickly that he dodged the shot in that way. I had seen them shoot at him a number of times, and I could see the splash of bullet or shot in the water before the loon dived.

I ridiculed the idea of the dodging, and that led to my shooting him to support my contention. When I skinned the bird I found and counted over a hundred No. 6 shot sticking to the inside of the hide, and so doing him no permanent harm. It is remarkable that he was never hit in the eye nor sustained a broken wing.

Another thing peculiar to the loon is that after the chicks are hatched, if the mother wishes to move far she will make a shallow dive and come up under her babies and swim off with them on her back. The person that succeeds in photographing her under such conditions may well claim the pennant.

Only once have I seen a loon shoulder her young, although for over twenty years I lived in the part of Michigan where there was the best chance imaginable to watch loons. Now the timber has been cut off around most of the lakes, and such favorable conditions for observation no longer exist.

Although I have only once seen a loon shoulder her babies, I have seen her swimming with them on her back many times. Once one swam within twenty feet of me and never suspected my presence.

One of their calls when sitting on the water for volume beats that of any other bird or beast that I know of. I have heard them in the night when they were more than five miles distant, for they only make that kind of call from the water, and there was no lake in that direction short of that distance. To say that the loon is a very interesting bird is as mild as I can express it.

Hog's Keen Sense of Hearing.

From the New Orleans Times-Democrat.

"Hogs have a much keener sense of hearing than most people seem to think," said a man from the country. "They can see well and at a considerable distance, but the nose and eyes of the hog must give first place to the ears.

This is so, no doubt, because hearing is probably the most useful of the senses in the hog life, particularly at that season of the year when the hog in the wild state must rely upon the fruitage of trees, in the main, for food. Even with this advantage it is frequently a fierce race to see which hog can get there first. It would be interesting to know just how far a hog can hear an acorn fall. It is remarkable how quickly they become cognizant of the fact that an acorn has been blown from its outer shell, and tumbling toward the ground, and he seems to catch the sound quicker when he knows a competitor is near who will run him a race for the nut. I have witnessed some fierce and interesting races between hogs, with an acorn as the stake.

"Put a hog within twenty yards of an oak and in nine cases out of ten he will beat the acorn to the place. In nine cases out of ten the hog will be within a few feet of where the acorn strikes the ground, another fact which argues the superiority of the hog's hearing. He can apparently tell pretty well by the sound where the acorn will fall, and he will rarely miss it more than a few feet."